

Talcott (S. H.)

THE

*Insane Diathesis,*

— \* BY \* —

SELDEN H. TALCOTT, A.M., M.D.,

MEDICAL SUPERINTENDENT

*State Homœopathic Asylum*

FOR THE INSANE,

MIDDLETOWN, N. Y.



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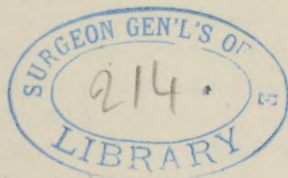
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DR. DUNCAN, of Chicago, classifies babies under two heads, namely: the "acid" and the "alkaline;" and from such a physiological standpoint, he argues new methods by which our infant population may be best trained in the way it should grow.

Dr. Grauvogl, in his metaphysics of medicine, entitled "Text Book of Homœopathy," designates the various constitutions of the human body as "Hydrogenoid," "Oxygenoid," and "Carbo-nitrogenoid."

As inherent physical characteristics may be thus classified and designated, why is it not equally legitimate to specify either natural or acquired mental peculiarities by terms of a similar basic or inherent import?

Mental abnormality is always due to either imperfect or eccentric physical development, or to the effects of inborn or acquired physical disease, or to injurious impressions, either antenatal or post natal, upon that delicate and intricate physical structure, the human brain. Some forms of physical imperfection more than others, give rise to mental derangements. Some persons more than others, when affected by any bodily ailment, tend to aberrated conditions of the mind. Some impressions more than others, are peculiarly unfortunate by reason of their corroding effects upon the tablets of a sensitive mind.

To these natural defects and unnatural tendencies, we apply in a general way, the term, "The Insane Diathesis." It is a state or condition in mental pathology corresponding to those diathesis so common in physical pathology, to wit, scrofulous, cancerous, scorbutic, rheumatic, gouty and calculous.

“The Insane Diathesis” is a general term applying to all those conditions which tend to the inception and growth of mental unsoundness. There might be sub-divisions, such as the melancholic diathesis, the maniacal diathesis, the parietic diathesis; but we do not purpose in the brief limits of a society paper to pursue the question to its ultimate ramifications. It will suffice if we expose a few of the large roots of this growing and gigantic curse upon the human intellect.

The insane diathesis may be either hereditary or acquired; in the former case it might be compared to the scrofulous, in the latter the gouty diathesis.

Those who are born to become insane do not, necessarily, spring from insane parents, or from an ancestry having any apparent taint of lunacy in the blood; but they do receive from their progenitors certain impressions upon their mental and moral as well as their physical being, which impressions, like an iron mould, fix and shape their subsequent destinies. Hysteria in the mother may develop the insane diathesis in the child; drunkenness in the father may impel epilepsy, or mania, or dementia in the son. Ungoverned passions in the parents may unloose the furies of unrestrained madness in the minds of their children. Even untempered religious enthusiasm may beget a fanaticism that cannot be restrained within the limits of reason.

As the development of progression is slow and gradual, so likewise is the development of degradation. As men attain high moral or intellectual achievements only through the efforts of succeeding generations, so it seems but natural that the insane should, oftentimes, trace their sad humiliation and utter unfitness for the duties of life, back through a tedious line of passion unrestrained; of prejudice, bigotry, and superstition unbridled; of lust unchecked; of intemperance uncontrolled; and of nerve resource wasted, exhausted, and made bankrupt before its time.

Here are dangers to the human race which potent drugs cannot avert; here are maladies which medicines cannot cure. But the medical man, the conservator of the public health, realizing the dangers which threaten his community or state, may help, if he will, to parry the rude blow which the Present thoughtlessly aims at the Future; and by timely warnings and appeals to



his clients of to-day, may save for his own treatment, rather than that of an asylum, his clients of to-morrow.

This is not a warning against fictitious danger, for in many minds the idea prevails that insanity is alarmingly on the increase. Even if that be not true, we are at least prepared to assert that insanity is "holding its own," so to speak, while there ought to be, in the world's mighty march to higher and better things, a constant lessening of those evils and perils which beset mankind.

Now what are the causes, the outward evidences, and the best means for prevention of this early beginning, steadily growing, far reaching curse, which comes only to torment with purgatorial tortures, its victims before the time. We have already hinted at some of the causes. These are most frequently traceable to the methods of life of those who produce children under such conditions that their offspring bear the indelible birthmark of the insane diathesis. A cause is found in the early dissipation of that father who brings to the work of perpetuating his kind, only an exhausted and enfeebled body, and a demoralized and *blase* mind.. A cause is discovered in the mother who contributes her mite to earthly immortality, but who tarnishes that mite with the dross of her own unhallowed and unhealthy existence. Causes are developed from the parents' unclipped imagination, or sordid desire, or base motive, or succession of mean action, or trial of fear, or passion of remorse, or depletion of the bodily system, or undue gratification of appetite, or from any perversion of the physical, mental, or moral powers. The insane diathesis is a product of all those forces which tend to rack and wreck the minds and bodies of those whose lives do not conform to the highest precepts of the Laws of Nature. It is a "genetic evolution" of the *worse* from the *bad*.

"Cursed be the social wants that sin against the strength of youth!"

"Cursed be the sickly forms that err from honest nature's rule!"

Not only is the insane diathesis the fruit of wrong living and wrong thinking in the early lives of the parents, but it is often the result of peculiar states in which the producing pair find themselves at the supreme moments of impregnation, and like-

wise in the unpleasant emotions induced by the surroundings of the mother during pregnancy.

Drunkenness, lust, rage, mental anxiety, or even incompatibility, if admitted to participation in the act of conception, will, each in turn, often set the seal of their presence in the shape of idiocy, imbecility, or insanity. The famous Diogenes recognized this fact when he reproached one of those half-witted, cracked-brained unfortunates, with the remark: "Surely, young man, thy father begat thee when he was drunk." Burton, in his "Anatomy on Melancholy," also states that "if a drunken man gets a child it will never likely have a good brain." Other unfortunate passions and conditions exert as deleterious an effect upon the formative process of new human life as drunkenness. As an example we give the following authentic case: A father had the pleasure of seeing two of his sons grow up strong and vigorous, mentally and physically, while a third was weak, irresolute, fretful, suspicious, and half demented. He confessed to his physician the cause of this family mishap, in these words: "In the summer of 18— I failed, owing to my rogue of a partner running off with all our money. No man, perhaps, ever felt such a misfortune more keenly than I did, and it seemed to me I should never get over the shock. I was completely unmanned and feared I should go crazy. Well, during this state of things my wife conceived, and *there is the result*. Poor S.! He inherits just the state of mind I was then in."

Scores of such cases might be cited. Such warnings are not single or singular. Such consequences are the inevitable results of an utter disregard of the simple and plain requirements of nature. A sound body and a cheerful mind can only be produced from a healthy stock; those who multiply with disease in their bones, care on their minds, and canker in their hearts, simply perpetuate and intensify their own pains and sorrows and cares. Unpleasant influences brought to bear upon the helpless mother during the delicate period of pregnancy, or the free exercise of unholy passions in her heart while thus living a duplex life, are so marked by the production of a vast variety of mental peculiarities that historical, scientific, and medical works are replete with the untimely records.



Rizzio was murdered in the presence of that beautiful and gifted, but unfortunate, Mary, Queen of Scots, she being at that time pregnant with James VI. Her son, though a monarch and born to rule, had a constitutional timidity of temperament, and a great terror of a drawn sword; nor can it be doubted that the shock upon his mother's mind, occasioned by her being the unwilling witness to the brutal murder of one she unwisely loved, and that, too, while she was *enciente*, contributed to stamp upon him those peculiarities which distinguished him in so marked and discreditable a manner from all the rest of the line of Stuart.

Ishmael practiced the insanity of hate, because his mother lived with that emotion uppermost in her heart, while bearing within her own body the germ of a nation of haters. The first Napoleon became a great warrior, and cherished the delusion of destiny, because his mother, while carrying him in her womb, "exercised queenly powers over her spirited charger and the subordinates of her husband," and daily associated with the bravest and best, as well as most superstitious, of the French army. Surely her state of mind during her son's formative process had much to do with the subsequent great Captain's passion for war, and likewise his delusive belief in destiny.

Children born under influences of fear are most likely to take on that bent of mind which leads to insanity. Mr. P. murdered his wife and nine children. Fear pervaded the minds of several pregnant women in the neighborhood, lest they should meet with a similar fate; and the children, born soon after, grew up to be crazed by the same emotion that had almost paralyzed their "feminine progenitors." An insane man always manifested the greatest fear of being killed, and constantly implored those around not to hurt him. His mother had lived with a drunken husband who had often threatened to kill her, once pursuing her with a carving knife. She managed to escape, and shortly afterwards gave birth to this son, who was constantly possessed with the pangs of fear, until he finally took his own life that he might escape apprehended dangers.

Not only individuals but whole communities are sometimes affected in the manner we have mentioned; and the strongest facts prove that "the faculties which predominate in power and

activity in the parents, when the organic existence of the child commences, determine its future mental disposition." Esquirol remarks that "the children whose existence dated from the horrors of the first French Revolution turned out to be weak, nervous, and irritable in mind, extremely susceptible of impressions, and liable to be thrown by the least extraordinary excitement into absolute insanity." I believe that the noticeable increase of insanity throughout this country during the past few years, is due quite as largely to the anxieties, depressions and fears caused by our late civil war, as to the financial crisis which followed it. The crop of children springing from parents whose married life dates from the early part of the war, is now furnishing a large quota of this increase to the ranks of insanity.

As we have already stated, the insane diathesis may be acquired, as well as inherited, and by the following means:

*First*, by imperfect nutrition; *secondly*, by slight and almost imperceptible injuries to the brain; *thirdly*, by those fears which are sometimes excited in the minds of children *for purposes of government*, (diabolic doings of parents and nurses); *fourthly*, by cruelty and neglect; *fifthly*, by overtaxing of the undeveloped physical powers; *sixthly*, by unwise forcing of the mind in its immature stage; and *seventhly*, by the premature and unnatural excitement of the sexual organisms of the young.

Insanity is a result of diseased conditions of the brain. It manifests its presence through the medium of the mind, but the materials it feeds upon are the tissues of the cerebral structure, and the force it assails is the *vis vitalis*. Hence it is easy of comprehension that whatever tends to the weakening of the cerebrum, or the exhaustion of the sources of life, must necessarily favor the inception and growth of insanity. Lack of proper nutrition for the brain is, therefore, a prime cause of acquired mental abnormality.

As severe blows upon the head cause concussions, congestions, and inflammations which speedily terminate the lives of those thus injured, so slight blows, quickly forgotten, perhaps, often result in stealthily developed, but none the less dangerous conditions which eventuate in derangement of all the mental faculties.

Fright, occasioned by threats of punishment, by locking up in dark rooms, by stories of greedy bears or grinning ghosts, produces oftentimes a mental shock that not only renders the child wretched during its early life, but brands the brow of its victim with the mark of impending insanity, a mark as deep and indelible as the trace of an actual cautery. This wound upon the child's mental being may apparently heal, but the rude chafings of the world will, at some future time, rend the cicatricial tissue and produce an irruption of insanity. These deplorable results may not only follow the emotions of fear aroused in the minds of the young, but the diathesis may develop from all those cruelties and neglects which are thoughtlessly or wilfully practiced by those parents who have never realized the vast responsibility of their sacred charge. Such practices by the parents, foster in the children the growth and unchecked use of those passions which, unchained and uncontrolled, tend most surely to the overthrow of mental poise.

As insanity is most prevalent among the working classes, and as it frequently succeeds the utter exhaustion of all the physical forces, it follows most conclusively that overwork of the young and immature is a pre-eminent cause of their gravitation toward that abyss, into which the full grown and the strong are so readily precipitated, when their grasp upon reason has been paralyzed by the grinding toils of life. Our factories, shops and stores are not only for the production and display of artistic and useful wares, but when the young are employed in them, and overtaxed by day and by night, they become the feeders of asylums for the insane, as well as the producers of material for premature graves.

But by far the most common cause of acquired insanity is the forcing system adopted at the present time for the education of the young. While we believe that proper education and training of the human mind is one of the best of prophylactics against insanity, we also hold that, like all other agencies which when properly applied, are most patent for good; and which, when misdirected, become the most terrible instruments of evil; the system of popular education, as now practiced, is fraught with dangers that are likely, unless checked, to destroy the very



end it is intended to accomplish. Instead of seeking first to insure a sound physical basis for the mental superstructure, our present methods tend to break down physical health; to dry up the primal sources of existence; and to bring to eventual wreck all the powers of body and of mind. It is only by violating the prevalent methods of education, and by playing truant in spite of threats or entreaties, that we have enough of real, genuine yankee vitality left in the nation to cope with the difficulties, and cares, and labors, which the demands of the times put upon us. Well might the eloquent Dupaty exclaim, when gazing at the magnificent anatomical museum at Florence: "Philosophy has been in the wrong not to descend more deeply into physical man; there it is that the mental and moral man lies concealed." When our public educators come to appreciate the sublime fact that the human body and the physical brain must be first sufficiently developed and perfected, and that mental growth must follow, not precede, physical growth, and, if need be, be restrained with a steady hand, and that the minds of the young must be guided to grand achievement with discriminating judgment, then our schools will no longer be hotbeds for the propagation of imbecility, nor gardens for the cultivation of lunatics. Mental culture may *accompany* physical growth, but always in the order of an army following its leader. When perfect discipline is attained, and the hour for battling with the world arrives, then the mental forces will certainly march to the front, and they will take with them the inspirations of health and good blood.

That grand philosopher, Herbert Spencer, referring to the evils of intellectual cramming, voices a timely warning to both youth and age in these emphatic words: "On old and young the pressure of modern life puts a still increasing strain. Go where you will, and before long there come under your notice cases of children or youths of either sex, more or less injured by undue study. Here, to recover from a state of debility thus produced, a year's restriction has been found necessary. There, you find a chronic congestion of the brain that has already lasted many months, and threatens to last much longer. Now you hear of a fever that has resulted from the over excitement in some way brought on at school. And again, the instance is that of a youth

who has already had once to desist from his studies, and who, since he has returned to them, is frequently taken out of his class in a fainting fit."

"We state facts—facts that have not been sought for, but have been thrust upon our observation during the last two years, and that too within a very limited range. Nor have we by any means exhausted the list. Quite recently we had the opportunity of marking how the evil becomes hereditary, the case being that of a young lady of robust parentage, whose system was so injured by the regime of a Scotch boarding-school, where she was underfed and overworked, that she invariably suffers from vertigo on rising in the morning, and whose children, inheriting this enfeebled brain, are several of them unable to bear even a moderate amount of study without headache or giddiness."

Thus, from apparently small beginnings, are the evils of our race perpetuated and intensified. How long, think you, will it take to propagate, from stock *progressing* (') in this direction, the insane diathesis?

Again, Herbert Spencer remarks: "How commonly constitutions are thus undermined will be clear to all who, after noting the frequent ailments of hard-worked professional and mercantile men, will reflect on the disastrous effects which undue application must produce upon the undeveloped systems of the young. The young are competent to bear neither as much hardship, nor as much physical exertion, nor as much mental exertion, as the full grown. Judge, then, if the full grown so manifestly suffer from the excessive mental exertion required of them, how great must be the damage which a mental exertion, often equally excessive, inflicts upon the young."

A marked case of imperfect nutrition and mental overwork, resulting in insanity, has lately come to my knowledge. The patient, a young, ambitious Welshman, was brought up on a farm where he was overworked and (in common with many of the poorer classes of Welsh) but indifferently fed. From this hard and monotonous life he passed to the severe study and indoor confinement now thought necessary to preparation for college. Though slight in form and weak in body he succeeded in his new work remarkably, and was a leader in intellectual

achievements at the academy in his native village. Last summer he entered college, but only to break down under the unnatural strain; for in a few months he passed on from the quiet shades of learning to the shadier refuge of an insane asylum. The diathesis in this case was acquired by the means mentioned, for there is no history of hereditary taint, and no other causes for insanity to be found. Such a case illustrates both the unwisdom of the victim for pursuing such a suicidal course, and the folly of his parents for permitting it to be entered upon by the son. It should also serve as a warning to those who are yet free from the distressing toils of unwise scholarly ambition.

A final cause inducing the insane diathesis lies in that growing and deplorable social malady—the premature and excessive excitement of the sexual organism. It is scarcely needful to argue the fact that masturbation is alarmingly prevalent among the young. The books are full of printed proofs; and the appearance of the young, in our schools and on the streets, is an open page of the most indisputable evidence. Most of the insane in asylums, who are yet adolescent, present histories and marks of this damning practice. A medical friend\* living in the West, in a recent letter, says: “I have recently cured a case of epilepsy, in a lad of three years of age, due to masturbation. (?) At least he performed all the tactics of that ‘manual.’ He had been circumcised, but it did no good. For some curious similar instances see *London Hospital Report*, Vol. II., P. 58.”

That such a practice tends not only to epilepsy, but to imbecility, mania and dementia, the experiences of the past in almost every asylum abundantly demonstrate.

Now the question arises, “What are the outward evidences of the insane diathesis?” They are numerous and complicated, yet withal not difficult for the experienced eye to detect. They present themselves in every varying shade of imperfect physical development, in endless varieties of cranial contour, and in numerous types of facial expression. To understand them most fully, let us present an historical model of a well balanced brain, and contrast that with the appearance of an afflicted being whose inevitable tendency is to mental obliquity. Every one recog-

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\* Dr. Samuel A. Jones.



nizes a healthy constitution and rare mental equipoise when the name of the illustrious Washington is mentioned. Who ever suspected the father of his country of leanings toward insanity? What regularity invested his every feature. What benevolence characterized and tempered his every expression. He had passions like unto other men; but he likewise possessed magnificent powers of self-control. While strong, he was not erratic; while intense he was thoroughly self-poised. While towering like a mountain, he was yet broadest at the base. While impassioned as a heated furnace, and resistless, under excitement, as an avalanche, he was at the same time steady with reserved force, and always calm and unruffled as a sphinx. There were, in Washington, no tendencies to insanity. Few men are farther removed from inclinations toward madness. Contrast the brain symmetry of such a man with the uncanny shapes and illogical mind action of one whose bent is ever toward that which is incongruous and intellectually dierotic. Picture the benign features of the first president; and, again, behold the distorted countenance of a Quilp chattering vengeance against those around him. Contrast the beaming expression of him who was first in his countrymen's hearts with that wretched Barnaby Rudge, of whom the master of novelists writes: "He was about three and twenty years old, and though rather spare, of a fair height, and strongly made. His hair, of which he had a great profusion, hung in disorder about his face and shoulders, and gave his restless looks an expression quite unearthly—enhanced by the paleness of his complexion.

"Startling as his aspect was, there was something plaintive in his wan and haggard looks. *For the absence of the soul is far more terrible in a living man than in a dead one*; and in this unfortunate being, its noblest powers were wanting. In his face there was wildness and vacancy."

In the faces of all whose diathesis is that of a sickly mentality, there are always the marks of disorder and desolation. Their "dome of thought" is but a dilapidated "mansard," and the windows of their souls are darkened from within by an unseemly and non-protective armament against approaching storms.

The heads of those born or bred to insanity are almost always mis-shapen. One side is fuller than the other; one ear is set higher than the other; the eyes peer forth in a restless, uncertain way, from beneath beetling brows; the nose slants slightly across the face; the mouth has an uneven cut, and the lips match each other but poorly. The cheek bones are unusually prominent, or, what is more likely, flat or receding; the head is not set squarely and firmly on the shoulders but inclines to almost any angle rather than the position perpendicular.

There are also, in such persons, great varieties of expression—the sinister, the ugly, the mock sober, the leering, the vacillating, the tricky. There may be developed, unmistakably, in the features, the malice of the mule, the cunning of the fox, the grinning fiendishness of the hyena, or the sedate sottishness of swine. All these external marks and appearances are but the mirrored images of distorted minds. Inherent crookedness is thus forcibly displayed; and the tendencies of the inner man to wallow in the mire of mental ruin are ever thus revealed.

Are there means for avoiding the development and growth of the insane diathesis? Are there means for the cure or relief of transmitted or acquired physical or mental defects? Here are questions which previous generations have left unanswered; questions which the century we live in, the mightiest in achievement the world has ever known, has thus far failed to satisfactorily solve. Yet the solution of such problems is not difficult. The only cause of failure to solve, thus far, lies in the facts of misapprehension, inattention and neglect.

To avoid the evils liable to arise from the propagation of the insane diathesis, the parties to the crime must pause, and study the new philosophy of life, a philosophy which shall guide them to the accomplishment of high and noble results, rather than to those which are ignoble and demoralizing to humanity. The avoidance of debasing passions, the putting away of that cup whose contents are adders' juices, the shunning of all unnecessary anxieties, and carking cares of life; and in their stead, the patient cultivation of all higher virtues, and better tempers, will insure an offspring that will not only bless their ancestry, but will fill the earth with happiness and health, and unruffled contentment of mind and spirit.

"Like begets like," (though with increasing or decreasing intensity) not only in physical contour, but in mental symmetry, or mental idiosyncrasy; and not only are the *general* thoughts and emotions of the parents impressed upon posterity, but even the flitting passion of a moment may cast a cloud of darkness over an entire life, just as the silvered sheet of the photographer receives a fadeless impression from a transient ray of sunlight. The mind of the unborn, like the slip that revolves in the phonograph, may receive impressions of happy or unholy thoughts, and reproduce them with faithful accuracy in the years to come; aye, even when the brain of the mother is but dust, and her heart no longer responds to any emotion, and her guiding hand is palsied in the grasp of death. To that holy of holies, then, the sacred temple of procreation, should be brought only such offerings as are certain to prove acceptable to the Lord of Nature. While the mother bears within her being the helpless and impressionable new life, there should surround her a magic presence of benign and stimulating influences, from which influences the coming mind may draw inspirations that shall feed, and nourish and develop all its forces to a symmetrical perfection.

When once the human being has appeared upon the carpet of life, then the practical work of nourishment, development and training of a physical body and an immortal mind has fairly begun. The great end should now be to remedy, as far as possible, all inherent defects, and to promote the growth of all possible virtues and powers. The children should be watched over, and guarded and guided with the same jealous care that was (or ought to have been) exercised toward the mother during the sacred semester of pregnancy. The youth should be trained after the fashion of the Persians, who taught their sons to ride magnificently on horseback, to shoot with accuracy, and to always speak the truth; and when these accomplishments were acquired they left them to pursue their mental work in the manner most suited to their individual tastes. Even the ungainly in body, and the disordered and distorted in mind, would develop approximate symmetry and usefulness if subjected to such methods with patience and perseverance. Even in the worst types of mental disease there are some salient and bright spots upon which good influen-



ees may act, and against which may be directed valuable curative agents.

“There is some soul of goodness in things evil,  
Would men observingly distil it out.”

Bright surroundings, pleasant associations, stimulating encouragements, abundant food of the best quality, air, exercise and sunlight, together with simple direction, not forcing of the mental faculties, will, in the course of patient time, produce from even poor stock, such a robust and cultured race as to be the astonishment of those who furnish and mould the material.

And to crown all, we may, I think, be permitted to state that Homeopathy, from her fruitful mines, has already dug out those motor medicines which are not only of assistance in the cure of disease, but which may, if properly applied, act as mighty stimuli in the growth and perfection of the human body, and as a consequence the clearer and stronger action of the human mind. Such remedies as *Calcarea Carbonica*, and *Hepar*, and *Graphites*, and *Phosphorous*, and *Sepia*, and *Silicia*, and *Sulphur*, have here a field for action surpassing any in which they have heretofore exercised a commanding and potent influence. The “tissue remedies,” so called, are, we believe, destined to win triumphs in this new arena which shall transcend all the glories of medical achievement in the past. God hasten the day when we may learn how to wield these mighty weapons against fateful heredity and acquired degeneracy aright!

We now take the liberty of presenting the methods adopted by a few of earth's great ones for their own education and intellectual self-advancement. We give them both as models worthy of study and imitation, and as means to be adopted for the prevention and avoidance of those mental evils which have already made blank and short the lives of so many of the fair and young.

“They the holy ones and weakly,  
Who the cross of suffering bore;  
Folded their pale hands so meekly,  
Spake with us on earth no more.”

We present the experiences of those whose ideas of education are in harmony with our own firmly settled beliefs. That the views thus taken, upon this great question, are sound, practi-

cal, and common sense, we are convinced by a contemplation of the results.

Chancellor Kent thus narrates the pleasant story of his early and later life :

“I was brought up among the highlands and hilly parts of Connecticut, and was never kept on the *high pressure* plan of instruction. It was not then the fashion. I went to school, and studied in the easy, careless way, until I went to college. I was daily and sometimes for a month or more, engaged in juvenile play, and occasional efforts on the farm. I was roaming over the fields, and fishing, and sailing, and swimming, and riding, and playing ball, so as not to be but *very superficially learned*, when I entered college. I was not in college half the time. I was at home at leisure, or at gentle work, and much on horseback, but never in the least dissipated. I easily kept pace with my class, for it was in the midst of the American War, and there were no scholars or much stimulus to learn. *Silent leges inter arma*. When I went to study law, I had my own leisure, and great exercise and relaxation in enchanting rides, and home visits, until I got to the bar. I lived plain—drank nothing but water—ate heartily of all plain, wholesome food that came in my way—was delighted with rural scenery, and active and healthy as I could be. Here I laid the *basis of a sound constitution*, in which my brain had not been unduly pressed or excited, and only kept its symmetry with the rest of the animal system. It was not until I was twenty-four, that I found I was very superficially taught, and then *voluntarily betook myself to books*, and to learn the classics, and everything else I could read. The ardor and rapidity with which I pursued my law and literary course, was great and delightful, and my *health and spirits* were sound and uniform, and neither has faltered, down to this day.” \*

You all know the magnitude and glory of the great chancellor's life-work. Can there be a stronger argument in favor of moderation in the acquirement of knowledge during early life, and in favor of persistent storing up of vital capital for future drafts, during the formative period, than this brief autobiography of the distinguished and truly learned Kent ?

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\* Written in 1833, at the age of 69.

Harriet Martineau, in her fascinating essay on the *Genius of Sir Walter Scott*, while speaking of his early education, says:

"Here is a boy lying about in the fields, when he should have been at his Latin grammar; reading novels when he should have been entering college; spearing salmon instead of embellishing a peroration. Yet this personage came out of this wild kind of discipline, graced with the rarest combination of qualifications for enjoying existence, achieving fame, and blessing society. Deeply learned, though neither the languages, nor the philosophy of the schools, made part of his acquisition; *robust* as a ploughman; able to walk like a pedlar; industrious as a handicraftsman; intrepid as the bravest hero of his own immortal works. Here is enough to put us on inquiring, not whether learning, and even school discipline be good things, but whether the knowledge usually thought most essential, the school discipline which is commonly esteemed indispensable, be in fact either the one or the other."

One thing is certain; few schools, where rigid mental discipline is practiced, have ever turned out a man who has strictly performed all the requirements of the curriculum, and who has subsequently risen to the stature of such an intellectual giant as Sir Walter Scott. Yet we are in favor of schools and colleges. We only condemn their tendency to put the intellectual cart before the physical horse.

It is written of Adam Clarke that he was "a very unpromising child, and learned but little before he was eight or ten years old. But at this age he was 'uncommonly hardy' and possessed bodily strength superior to most children. He was considered a 'grievous dunce,' and was seldom praised by his father but for his *ability to roll large stones*." It was that kind of ability, however, which enabled him to become in later years, the intellectual master that he was.

The examples we have given happily demonstrate the wisdom of primarily developing the physical forces, and the ease and rapidity with which mental acquirements may then follow. The wisdom seems to have been owing to an inborn impulse in the children, rather than to mature and guiding judgment in the fathers.



Over against these illustrious examples of wise and proper growth, we may place those of Becklard, the celebrated French anatomist, who went down to death in his early and promising prime through the effects of youthful over-study; and Casimer Perrier, one of the chief ministers of France, who succumbed to brain disease brought on by premature mental anxiety and work, while he was yet in the vestibule of manhood; and Chatterton, the boy poet, who left earthly glory through the black portals of suicide, having been driven thither by the madness of an overwrought brain. To these might be added the names of John Keats, and Kirk White, and Edgar A. Poe, and many other gifted individuals, whose premature deaths are clearly tracable to excessive drains upon the nervous system, largely due to general and powerful excitement to mental activity ere the corporeal structure had reached maturity.

To emphasize still further, I would quote, in brief, the wise reflections of Paulding: "Knowledge should only keep pace with the natural growth of the human faculties. When I see a little urchin, who ought to be enjoying nature's holiday, and strengthening his constitution by wholesome exercise to bear the vicissitudes of the world in after times, kidnapped and sent to school, to sit on a bench for four or five hours together, employed in learning by rote what he is unable to comprehend, I cannot help contemplating him as the slave and the victim of the vanity of the parent, and the folly of the teacher. Such a system is only calculated to lay a foundation for disease and decrepitude, to stint the physical and intellectual growth, and to produce a premature old age of the body and mind."

In conclusion, we offer another warning and another injunction to the young—to the effect that not only must the mental powers be protected from premature exhaustion by overwork, but they must also be fortified against the too common dissipations of youth, and sustained by the recuperative influences of timely and abundant sleep. It is natural to be spendthrift of those gifts which are lavishly dispensed to us, and of which we seem to have an exhaustless supply. Hence we waste our youthful vigor, amid scenes of exciting folly, not only by day, but through the long drawn and precious hours of the night—hours that are precious

because of their designed purpose to replenish and restore the inevitable wastes of life. Through moderation alone are happiness and health long conserved. The midnight lamp of the worker, and the midnight lamp of the pleasure seeker, alike consume with undue avidity the cruse of oil allotted to each one's life. Therefore, these must be "put out" early if the owner would live long and well in the land. Not only must excessive waste be shunned, but restoration and repair must be steadily and perseveringly attained. The sin of omission is quite as heinous as the sin of commission. To neglect the maintainance of one's powers, in their fullest possible measure, is as deplorable and wrong as the throwing away of strength already acquired. Therefore, we press home with the utmost earnestness, the necessity for sleep, and the plain duty of securing so much of the "sweet restorer" as shall abundantly compensate for the fatigues and cares of each day's life. And to make the lesson more impressive, we finish our appeal in the eloquent and beautiful language of a distinguished friend:\*

"Since from so many incontrovertible circumstances we are naturally prone to undue activity of mind, and since we are additionally exposed to the dangers attending upon over-taxed intellects, let us put the warder of repose between us and that state of mental tension which so constantly threatens our intellectual health. Let us, then, cultivate sleep—not the sleep of sloth and inertia, not the listless reverie of ennui, not the *Keff* of the Arab, or the noonday siesta of the tropics, but that other and nobler Somnus, whose temple opening only at night-fall, invites the weary, day-worn traveler to rest. Here, with the silent stars for his everlasting ministers, he sits enthroned in halls of sweet obliviousness, waiting with the lavish and impartial affection of a parent, to crown us all with the poppy wreaths of sleep."

The precepts embodied in such experiences and such teachings as we have endeavored to trace in this paper, are, we believe, sound and practical. If the medical profession would rise to the duty of properly warning both the young and their natural guardians, and if these would give heed to such warnings, then the

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\* Dr. John Ordonaux.

incomputable evils of premature forcing of the brain would be averted; the folly of dissipation would be shunned; the necessity for ceaseless repair would be recognized; and the sources of mental unsoundness, now burdened with a tropical luxuriance, would become barren and unproductive as the shores of the dead Dead Sea.









